In Memory of Professor John M. Goldman  
*Leukemia pioneer*  
1938-2013  
Written by Robert Peter Gale, MD, PhD

John M. Goldman, Emeritus Professor of Imperial College London, was a leader in studies of leukemia for the last 40 years. He focused on chronic myeloid leukemia (CML), a cancer of the blood and bone marrow. This was an incurable disease when Prof. Goldman began his research in 1971. He tackled the problem using the newly-developed technique of bone marrow transplantation. His approach was to collect blood cells from the leukemia victim, give the patient very high doses of drugs and radiation to eradicate the cancer, and rescue the person with their own stored blood cells. This worked in some people but not all, so he moved to other therapies, including interferon. In 1983, the molecular cause of this type of leukemia was identified, and by 1990 a drug was developed which controlled and sometimes cured the disease. This *targeted* approach to curing a cancer based on an understanding of its genetic basis is one of the great triumphs of modern cancer therapy and a model for treating other cancers. Prof. Goldman played an important role in proving the efficacy of imatinib, which has made CML a controllable disease and saved thousands of lives.

John Goldman was the son of Carl Heinz Goldman, a Jewish doctor who fled Germany in 1933 with his young wife Berthe to escape the Nazis’ racial laws. He arrived in London with a five pound note, his wife’s jewelry sewed into her clothes and a letter of introduction. He quickly established a successful Harley Street surgery and would later treat Elizabeth Taylor, Rex Reed, and Kay Kendall. Carl Heinz served in the British Army in WW II after, paradoxically, being detained as an enemy alien. Fortunately, he was able to bring his relatives to Britain before the outbreak of war.

John was born in 1938 and educated at Westminster School where he was a superior student. He was also in the choir but not allowed to perform at Westminster Abbey either because of his poor voice, religion, or possibly both. He was accepted to study Classics at Oxford but was abducted (his description) to Magdalene College to study Medicine. John completed his medical training at St. Bartholomew Hospital, London, after which he moved...
to the United States, taking positions in Miami and later at Harvard University whilst finding time to obtain his flying license.

In 1971, John joined a distinguished group of haematologists in the Department of Haematology at Hammersmith Hospital, including Sir David Galton, Professors Victor Hoffbrand and Daniel Catovsky, and others. He focused on chronic myeloid leukemia. John pioneered the use of bone marrow transplants whilst performing some of the first transplants in Europe in 1980. These transplants used related donors, usually a genetically-matched brother or sister, and although they were largely successful, most persons with leukemia lacked a suitable sibling donor. Prof. Goldman and his colleagues developed ways to use other relatives and, eventually, unrelated volunteers as donors. This allowed almost all leukemia victims to benefit from a transplant. To accomplish this, he helped establish the Anthony Nolan Trust Donor Registry of more than 500,000 volunteers. This registry of donors has been used to help persons needing transplant in Britain as well as more than 15 other countries.

In the 1990s, Goldman promoted the promising research of Professor Brian Drucker who, along with his colleagues, had developed imatinib, a new targeted leukemia therapy to treat CML that was directed towards the genetic mutation which caused the disease. The drug worked miraculously for leukemia, but no drug company was interested in developing it because leukemia is a rare disease. Much like the story of Florey and Chain who developed penicillin but had to travel to the United States to find a drug company willing to produce it, Goldman flew to Basel to persuade Novartis to manufacture imatinib. He succeeded, and imatinib and successor drugs are given to thousands of people worldwide, accounting for over 3 billion pounds of drug sales each year and used successfully to treat cancers besides leukemia.

Goldman founded several professional organizations promoting research and collaboration in blood disorders and transplantation, including the European Hematology Association and the European Bone Marrow Transplant Group. He was president of both. He was Chairman of the International Bone Marrow Transplant Registry (IBMTR, now CIBMTR) from 1998-2000. He also created charities, such as LEUKA with Prof. Jane Apperley, an organization raising money to fund leukemia research, including a new outpatient haematology center at Hammersmith Hospital.

Following his retirement from Hammersmith in 2004, Goldman focused on global health issues. He developed the International CML Foundation to make innovations in leukemia diagnosis and therapy available worldwide. He also spent a year at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, as the Fogarty Scholar. Lately he campaigned to reduce cancer drug prices so that people in developing countries could benefit from them. The World Health Organization predicts in 2050 more than one-half of cancers will occur in developing countries unable to afford proper cancer care at current costs.

Among his professional colleagues, Prof. Goldman was considered the leader in his field. He published over 700 scientific papers and many books; coordinated an international community of leukemia researchers; and fostered a climate of openness, collaboration, and
free intellectual exchange. He also mentored a generation of leukaemia specialists who now head haematology departments across the UK and around the world.

John Goldman was a skilled physician with legendary devotion to his patients. At the Hammersmith Hospital, he promoted the practice of daily consultant visits (the usual practice was weekly) and was regularly found in the early morning hours reading medical charts and reassuring sleepless patients. His American medical colleagues thought nothing of calling John at 1:00am London time to discuss an idea or complex medical case; no one is certain when (or if) he ever slept.

Prof. Goldman was a gentleman and scholar known by his colleagues and friends for his erudition, sense of irony, generosity, and modesty. He enjoyed reading Saki, Wilde, Shakespeare, Greek mythology, and histories of the Napoleonic wars. He loved skiing, spoke perfect French and passable Russian and Spanish, and travelled extensively. He once drove from London to India with a group of his Oxford classmates. When their party was briefly imprisoned by Iranian authorities, they escaped by drugging their guards with barbiturates. John also tried to solve the problem of the Elgin Marbles by suggesting a duplicate set be made and that each side alternately choose the piece they wanted until two full sets were assembled. No one has come up with a better solution, but the quandary remains; apparently, it is a trickier problem than curing CML.

John Goldman was invariably polite to colleagues, friends, and acquaintances, perhaps to a fault. When people approached him with bizarre ideas or scientific hypothesis, he was always polite commenting: “That’s an interesting idea.” Afterward he reminded senior colleagues of a quote from the first Duke of Wellington who, having been addressed by a passerby near Apsley House as: “Mr. Jones, I believe” replied: “If you believe that Sir, you will believe anything”.

John Goldman is survived by his daughters Lucy, a jeweler, and Cassie, a 747 pilot for British Airways; his son Jasper, a film-maker and urban planner; and their mother Connie. He is also survived by hundreds of grateful colleagues and people who owe their lives to his pioneering efforts to cure leukemia.